

Comments on the proposed conservation of the specific name of *Varanus teriae* Sprackland, 1991 (Reptilia, Squamata)

(Case 3043; see BZN 54: 100–103, 250–251)

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We believe that the specific name of *Varanus teriae* Sprackland, 1991 should not be conserved, and that for the following reasons the appropriate name is *Varanus keithhornei* (Wells & Wellington, 1985).

1. There is no reason to suspend the application of the Principle of Priority to conserve the specific name of *V. teriae*. In terms of common usage the case is weak. The history of *V. teriae* is short (only six years); notwithstanding the fact that it has been used more frequently than the prior name *V. keithhornei*, we believe that usage does not justify the conservation of *V. teriae*.

2. As the Commission declined to vote on the application to suppress the work by Wells & Wellington (see BZN 48: 337–338, December 1991), the name *V. keithhornei* is available. Though the description is poor, it is detailed enough to ensure that no confusion exists (or ever could exist) about either the taxon so named or the holotype. Wells & Wellington (1985, p. 21) clearly identify Queensland Museum specimen J31566 as the holotype of *Odatria keithhornei* and describe the species as ‘... readily identified by referring to the excellent diagnostic and descriptive data in Czechura (1980)’. Czechura had provided a very detailed description and illustration of this specimen, under the name *Varanus prasinus* Schlegel, 1839, and *V. keithhornei* (Wells & Wellington, 1985) is available under Article 13a(ii) of the Code. The same specimen is also the holotype of *V. teriae* Sprackland, 1991.

3. We (Covacevich & Couper, 1994) have already formally treated *V. teriae* as a synonym of *V. keithhornei*, in accordance with the Principle of Priority; Sprackland, Smith & Strimple do not mention this in their application to conserve *V. teriae* (although they have done so in their reply (BZN 54: 250) to a comment by Prof L.B. Holthuis on this case). The synonymy has now been recognised several times: Irwin (1996); Kirschner, Müller & Seufer (1996); Irwin & Irwin (1997); and in the Queensland Nature Conservation Regulations, 1997.

4. In our view the name *V. keithhornei* was not ‘obscurely published’, as stated by Sprackland et al. in their application. The Wells & Wellington (1985) work became an international *cause célèbre*, creating (initially at least) fears of impending taxonomic havoc. If only because these authors rejected ‘virtually every tenet of the voluntary Code of Ethics’ (BZN 48: 338) and achieved something approaching notoriety, their work was both extremely well known and widely discussed. Sprackland et al. allude at length (para. 4 of their application) to difficulties in obtaining a copy of Wells & Wellington (1985) where ‘... new varanid names might exist ...’. However understandable, even excusable, ignorance of the literature may sometimes be for taxonomists, it should not (we believe) be used as a rationale to overthrow the Principle of Priority. Furthermore, one letter to any herpetological

taxonomist in Australia would have secured a copy of the work prior to Sprackland's (1991) introduction of the name *V. teriae*.

5. The statement by Sprackland et al. (para. 6 of their application) that 'the specific name of *Varanus teriae* Sprackland, 1991 has consistently been used for the mainland species of tree monitor' is in error: as mentioned in para. 3 above, the older objective synonym *V. keithornei* has been used several times. A number of the usages of *V. teriae* cited by Sprackland et al. date from after the publication of the synonymy by Covacevich & Couper (1994) in a widely circulated journal (indeed the same one in which the name *V. teriae* was published), and thus are not in accord with the Code.

The International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature is accordingly asked to reject the application by Sprackland, Smith & Strimple to suppress the specific name of *Odatia keithornei* Wells & Wellington, 1985, and instead to place this name on the Official List of Specific Names in Zoology. The specific name of *Varanus teriae* Sprackland, 1991 should be placed on the Official Index as being a junior objective synonym of *O. keithornei*.

Acknowledgements

Dr Allen Greer (Australian Museum, Sydney), Dr Glenn Shea (University of Sydney), Dr Glenn Ingram (Queensland Museum, Brisbane) and Mr David Pepin (Washington University, St Louis, Missouri) made constructive suggestions on this comment.

Additional references

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I am writing to oppose the proposal to conserve the specific name of *Varanus teriae* Sprackland, 1991 by suppression of an earlier synonym.

1. The case for the suppression of *Odatia keithornei* Wells & Wellington, 1985 rests upon two premises. The major argument is that the junior synonym, *Varanus teriae*, is in common usage, and hence that use of the earlier name would cause considerable confusion. The minor argument is that the publication by Wells & Wellington (1985) in which *Odatia keithornei* was established is not readily obtainable.

2. The species concerned, an arboreal varanid lizard from Cape York Peninsula, Australia, was first formally reported by Czechura (1980), and tentatively identified